

828Q - Title

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I. Abstract

Past studies have shown success using evolutionary strategies to train neural networks. This report investigates how evolutionary strategies can be used to train neural networks dedicated to solving sub tasks, and a 'commander' neural network that selects which subtasks to execute in order to complete a larger, more complex task. The scenario the neural networks are being optimized to solve is a two-dimensional 'war-game' simulation in which networks are competign to locate and 'eliminate' one another. Networks that 'survive' each scenario are determined to be more fit, and are selected as parents for the next generations in the evolutionary strategies algorithm. Optimizations for training the neural networks are made to create a tradeoff between the simplicity of feed-forward neural networks, and the complexity of full connected neural networks. This involves having mini-networks inside which all nodes are fully connected, and sparse connections between nodes in different mini-networks.

II. Literature Review

Neural Networks have proven their ability to solve complex games with large search spaces. These Networks have been used to solve games as complex as Go, which has an enormous search space. This game has an optimal value function, but the search space has a search tree of size b^d . For Go, this search space is defined with $(b \approx 250, d \approx 150)$ ¹. This makes exhaustive search infeasible^{2,3}, so the search space must be reduced. In order to solve this complex problem two separate neural networks are used, a 'value network' for evaluating the board, and a 'policy network' for generating moves⁴. These networks are trained via a combination of supervised learning from data about games played by expert Go players, and reinforcement learning through self-play⁴.

Further extensions for training neural networks involve using Evolutionary Strategies⁵. Historically, reinforcement learning has been used to train neural networks for complex tasks in gaming⁶. However, evolutionary Strategies have demonstrated an alternate solution to reinforcement learning with comparable results, while reducing the complexity and training time required for models⁵. Evolutionary Strategies does not require backpropagation, is highly parallelizable, is more robust, has structure exploration, and performs better when actions have lasting effects⁵. Experimental results have demonstrated that neural networks can achieve comparable results to those of reinforcement learning in a time of one hour, compared to a training time of one day for reinforcement learning.

Evolutionary strategies does have tradeoffs of lower model performance, though the difference is negligible, and reduced efficiency when compared to reinforcement learning⁵.

The use of neural networks for agent navigation has been studied extensively^{7,8}. Much of the exploration in this space has been for autonomous robot navigation. These networks are based on standard feed-forward neural networks, which have demonstrated shortcomings when solving complex 2D environment. However, recurrent neural networks have shown an ability to solve 2D navigational problems that cononical neural networks have struggled with^{9,10}. Using simultaneous recurrent network which draw similarities to the hippocampus, difficult 2D navigation problems like maze navigation have been solved⁹.

Extensions to conventional neural networks that reduce the number of internal connections, and modify how they interact, have demonstrated equivalent functionality with reduced training times^{11,12}. Recurrent neural networks based on Nonlinear AutoRegressive models with exogenous Inputs (NARX models) have demonstrated an ability to limit the amount of feedback within a network without experiencing computational loss¹¹. These networks only limit feedback to so it only comes from output neurons, and not from hidden layers. These demonstrated that a significant reduction in feedback from conventional recurrent neural networks can be made without compromising the computation power of the model. Further studies show that a dynamical model of sensors can be accurately developed using recurrent neural networks as nodes. Essential, this model creates a larger network with internal nodes which are in turn recurrent neural network¹². These nodes then share information with a confidence factor, which can be viewed as a logical equivalent to connection weights in a neural network. This model is able to accurately describe a dynamical model, and demonstrated effectiveness when compared to conventional methods like the Kalman filter method¹².

III. Sources

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